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ABSTRACT

Community based instruction for severely handicapped students is a central way of enhancing independent living skills in the student's natural environment. Teaching skills in the settings in which students will be required to use them helps to facilitate the development of both skill acquisition and skill generalization. On-site instruction further reduces the probability of teaching irrelevant prerequisite skills and helps teachers become aware of variables that may interfere with skill acquisition. Neighborhood exposure helps handicapped students to develop appropriate behaviors and allows community members to become more cognizant of the needs of handicapped persons. Planning an on-site program includes conducting an ecological inventory, designing instruction through task analyses, and recording student progress. (CL)

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COMMUNITY BASED TRAINING FOR SEVERELY HANDICAPPED STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

A major issue confronting educators of severely handicapped children deals with the determination of the location for instruction. The setting in which services are provided is a crucial factor in educational programming. This paper offers a rationale for community based instruction and suggests instructional procedures and assessment techniques for use in community based training.

A major issue confronting those concerned with providing educational services to severely handicapped students deals with the determination of the location for instruction. The setting in which educational and related services are provided affects the range, quality, and substantive nature of those services (Brown, Ford, Nisbet, Sweet, Donnellan, & Gruenewald, 1983). This paper offers a rationale for community based instruction and suggests instructional procedures and assessment techniques for use in such community-based training.

A primary purpose of special education is to prepare handicapped students to function as independently and productively as possible in a wide variety of environments. In order to achieve this goal it is necessary to provide instruction in natural environments in which skills and behaviors needed for independent living can be acquired. This essential component of educational programming is referred to as community based instruction.

Simply stated, community based instruction refers to direct skill instruction which is provided in the student's natural enivronment, or community. Rather than teaching children to perform isolated skills within the confines of a classroom, in community based training, the teacher provides instruction in the actual settings in which students will be expected to perform tasks. Through teaching skills to handicapped students in settings in which they will be required to use these skills, teachers can facilitate the development of both skill acquisition and skill generalization.

Classroom instruction requires inferences that, as a result of skill generalization, students will be able to transfer skills learned within school buildings to nonschool environments. However, research has clearly shown that severely handicapped students tend to demonstrate learning deficits in the area of skill generalization (see for example, Sontag, Burke, & York, 1973). Community based on-site training reduces the need for such inferences by providing learning experiences in real-life situations. It increases the likelihood of appropriate skill performance in nonschool and postschool settings and better prepares students for community living.

PUTTING THEORY INTO PRACTICE

While numerous moral, legal, and educational arguments supporting community integration have been put forth (e.g., Bricker, 1978; Brown, Wilcox, Sontag, Vincent, Dodd, & Gruenewald, 1977; Dybwad, 1980; Marchetti, McCartney, Drain, Hooper, & Dix, 1983; Wehman, 1983; Wilcox, & Sailor, 1980), research on community based training programs to facilitate such integration has been less plentiful. Currently accepted educational theory emphasizes teaching severely handicapped students practical, useful life skills in normal environments (e.g., Fredericks, 1980). However, many skills still provide instruction only within the confines of the classroom.

Teaching Functional Skills

On-site instruction reduces the probability of teaching irrelevant prerequisite skills. In natural settings teachers are able to focus on

training students to perform practical age-appropriate skills; and activities, such as hammering pegs, weaving potholders, and sorting multicolored shapes, are replaced by more functional tasks which relate to specific student needs.

Providing training in actual community situations increases the teacher's awareness of relevant skills as well as of variables which can interfere with the acquisition of these skills. For instance, in teaching pedestrian safety rules at school, students might be instructed to wait until all approaching vehicles have passed prior to stepping off the curb. However, when teaching the identical skill on a residential neighborhood street, various unforeseen situations may arise. If, for example, a mailtruck is delivering mail and pausing at each mailbox along the street, it is not necessary to wait for this particular vehicle to pass before crossing.

By providing instruction in the natural setting, the teacher is able to see that students need not only be trained to wait for approaching vehicles to pass; students must also learn to recognize different types of vehicles and, when possible, to determine their general proximity. It can be seen through this example that on-site training can provide the teacher with valuable ecological experience and information necessary for preparing students to function successfully in the community.

Neighborhood Exposure

When instruction is provided within the neighborhood, handicapped students are likely to learn appropriate behaviors through interacting

with nonhandicapped persons. As handicapped students develop an awareness of how to conduct themselves in the community, this exposure will also help nonhandicapped persons to become more cognizant of the needs of handicapped people. Such neighborhood exposure tends to improve community attitudes toward handicapped persons while simultaneously teaching students skills and behaviors which are necessary for community living. Not only does community training better satisfy the "least" restrictive environment" mandate of Public Law 94-142; it actually enhances training effects which contribute to independent functioning and increased productivity by the student.

PLANNING AN ON-SITE PROGRAM

The first step in developing a community based training program requires that the teacher obtain relevant information about the environments in which a student is expected to function (Baumgart, Brown, Pumpian, Nisbet, Ford, Sweet, Ranieri, & Hanson, 1980). This information, or ecological inventory, can then be used in determining which skills to teach. The ecological inventory should include:

- A student profile identifying the relevant learning characteristics of the indivudal.
- A list of environments selected for each individual and a rationale for each selection.
- A sequential listing of the skills used by nonhandicapped persons within each selected environment.
- A list and description of special adaptions which may be necessary in each environment.

Designing Instruction: Task Analysis

Once training sites have been selected and specific objectives have been targeted, the teacher can begin to task analyze various skills to be taught in each environment. Ecological inventories are helpful in preparing accurate task analyses.

One commonly used objective in community training deals with teaching pedestrian skills (Matson, 1980). An example of a task analysis for street crossing is provided in Figure 1.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Recording Student Progress

Ongoing assessment is an integral element of any instructional program. Planning a system to evaluate and record student progress in on-site training requires somewhat different techniques than those which are used in classroom instructional programs.

Classroom training for severely handicapped students is often comprised of many trials over a short period of time. Appropriate data collection or recordkeeping procedures for such repeated practice teaching strategies are relatively easy to generate and to use in controlled school environments.

Nonschool instruction, on the other hand, is not as well-suited to classroom types of repeated trial training. Planned incidental learning opportunities are, instead, the focus of this type of instruction. Data collection techniques used in classrooms are often of little worth in community based training sessions.

The teacher providing on-site instruction will most likely find it necessary to employ a different kind of recordkeeping system than was

required in the classroom. Coded behavioral sample sheets can be quite helpful to teachers (Sulzer & Mayer, 1972). An example of such a data collection form is shown in Figure 2.

Insert Figure 2 about here

A key for the form shown in Figure 2 is provided at the bottom of the figure. Next to each letter on the key the teacher can designate in writing a targeted behavior to be increased or decreased. By merely slashing matching letters in the appropriate boxes, the presence of targeted behaviors within short time intervals may be recorded. The ten boxes are arranged horizontally in each row. These boxes are useful when collecting data pertaining to the percentage of intervals in which various behaviors, such as hitting or running, occur.

The form may also be utilized to collect data on a weekly basis. In order to assist the teacher with weekly recordkeeping, five boxes corresponding to the days of the week are provided vertically. If, for example, the teacher is interested in determining how many mornings a student hangs up a coat before school begins, this behavior can be specified on the key. Then, by slashing the corresponding letter each day on which the student hangs up the coat, a clear weekly record can be obtained.

This sample sheet may be easily used for a variety of recordkeeping purposes. Versatile data collection sheets, such as the sample shown in Figure 2, are helpful in reducing the amount of forms and paper work necessary for maintaining effective ongoing student assessment.

SUMMARY

Through community based training, students can receive direct skill instruction on relevant tasks in the natural environment. Such training is not only cost effective, in that it can conserve valuable teaching time and effort, it also enhances community integration efforts.

In order to plan a community based training program, the teacher should begin by conducting an ecological inventory of the environments in which the student is expected to function. After task sites have been selected and carefully studied for training purposes, the teacher should task analyze the various skills to be taught, bearing in mind the student's individual learning characteristics.

Community based instruction is an essential component of educational programming. On-site training, in which students are transported from their educational facilities to selected sites within the community, provides relevant learning experiences leading to the acquisition of functional life skills and lessening the need for generalization of skills learned in artificial settings.

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Figure 1. Sample community safety training task.

Name of Task: Crossing the Street.

Objective: When walking next to an adult, the student will come to a complete stop at the curb, wait for a green light, look in both directions, and proceed across the street when no vehicles are approaching (Criteria: 100% accuracy).

Instructional Setting: Residential street with traffic light.

Verbal Cue (initially): "(Name), cross the street."

Task Analysis

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1. Walks next to adult down street.
2. Stops at curb.
3. Looks at traffic light.
4. Waits for traffic light to turn green.
5. When light is green, looks to left.
6. If no vehicle is approaching from left direction, looks to right.
7. If no vehicle is approaching from the right, looks to left again.
8. If vehicle is approaching, waits for it to pass and repeats left-right-left sequence.
9. If road is clear of approaching vehicles, looks at traffic light again.
10. Crosses street when light is green and no vehicles are approaching.

Child: _____ Date: _____

Teacher: _____ Task: _____

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Monday	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
Tuesday	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
Wednesday	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
Thursday	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D
Friday	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D	A B C D

A _____ C _____

B _____ D _____

Figure 2. Data collection form for community-based training sessions.